

# Obituaries

## Carlo Urbani

World Health Organization official who raised the alarm over severe acute respiratory syndrome

Infectious diseases expert Dr Carlo Urbani died from sudden acute respiratory syndrome just weeks after he had helped to identify it and alert the world to its dangers.

Urbani, who was a World Health Organization public health specialist in charge of malaria and other parasitic diseases, based in Hanoi, Vietnam, first came across the syndrome in a Chinese-American businessman. The businessman, who had arrived in Hanoi on 23 February, was admitted to the French hospital in the Vietnamese capital on 26 February with a suspected case of bird flu. But when his condition worsened, the hospital called WHO on 28 February and Urbani went over to examine him. Two days later, not only had the businessman's condition worsened, but several members of the hospital staff had developed similar symptoms: a dry cough, difficulty breathing, and a fever.

On 3 and 4 March, Urbani told the hospital to isolate all patients and staff with these symptoms to prevent spread of the disease. The hospital was closed to the public, with guards posted outside, while staff inside started to wear masks and other protective clothing.

"When people became concerned in the hospital, he was there every day, collecting samples, talking to the staff, and strengthening infection control procedures," said Pascale Brudon, who heads the WHO regional office in Hanoi. "On Wednesday 5 March he said it was something very strange. We knew about influenza, but this was something different," said Brudon.

The disease had been circulating in China's Guangdong province since November 2002 and reached Hong Kong, where the businessman was believed to have been infected by a Guangdong doctor with whom he shared a hotel floor. But at the end of February it was still not clear that this was a new disease, nor had the extent of the outbreak come to light. Despite fewer cases and deaths, the Hanoi outbreak was the first signal to the outside world that something was wrong. It took less than a week for Urbani to realise that there was something strange and to implement infection controls.



GUIDO PICCHIO/AP PHOTO

In consultation with Brudon, Urbani alerted WHO headquarters in Geneva. The pair quickly won the support of the Vietnamese authorities to bring in outside help and on 7 March asked WHO for international experts. An internal global alert circulated around WHO that day asking for experts to come to Hanoi to help tackle the outbreak. The WHO regional adviser for communicable disease arrived from Manila, the Philippines, on 9 March.

Over the next few days, some of the world's leading epidemiologists arrived in Hanoi to help contain and study the outbreak, including a team from the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. On 15 March, although cases and deaths were still few in number, WHO publicly declared the syndrome a "worldwide health threat." Never had WHO reacted with such speed to an outbreak; in part this was thanks to Urbani and his colleagues in Hanoi.

As international experts poured into Hanoi, Urbani was due to fly to attend a meeting in Bangkok. He had been working flat out, visiting the French hospital nearly every day. Brudon told him he was "too exhausted" to carry on working and that he should go to the meeting.

It was on the flight to Bangkok on 11 March that Urbani first felt unwell. He had been in daily contact with people with the syndrome for nearly two weeks. As soon as he arrived in the Thai capital, he went straight to a hospital.

A few days before Urbani became ill, his wife, Giuliana, questioned whether he should be working so closely with patients with such a serious disease. Urbani, who had been posted to Hanoi in 2000, replied: "If I cannot even work in such situations, what am I here for? Answering emails, going to cocktails, and pushing paper?"

Urbani showed an early interest in working with poor and underprivileged people as a student, when he went to Africa. In the early 1990s, while he held a post in infectious diseases and parasitology at Macerata Hospital in the Italian city of Ancona, he organised a mission to Mauritania to collect baseline data on intestinal schistosomiasis to help the health ministry there control parasitic disease.

Dr Lorenzo Savioli, WHO's co-ordinator of parasitic diseases and vector control based in Geneva, invited Urbani on a WHO mission in 1993 to research the epidemiology of hookworms in the Maldives. After proving his "skill and dedication," Urbani was sent on a series of WHO missions to control helminths (parasitic worms) and became the first person to report the transmission of *Schistosoma mansoni* in Mauretania.

In 1995, he joined the Swiss branch of Médecins sans Frontières working in Cambodia, where his pioneering work in the control of *Schistosoma mekongi* and food-borne trematode parasites helped bring him "on board" at WHO.

Urbani later became president of the Italian branch of Médecins sans Frontières and was one of a team of doctors who received the 1999 Nobel peace prize in Norway on behalf of the international organisation. [FIONA FLECK]

*Carlo Urbani, public health specialist World Health Organization (b near Ancona, Italy, 1956; q Ancona 1981), died from sudden acute respiratory syndrome on 29 March 2003.*

## Walter Martin Browne



*Former medical officer McCord Hospital, Durban (b Hampstead 1927; q Cambridge 1951), died from pneumonia complicating longstanding Parkinson's disease on 22 January 2003.*

After house jobs and military service Martin, a quietly convinced Christian, went for two years to St Mary's Hospital, Kwa Magwaza in Zululand. After a spell in general practice in Gloucestershire, in 1963 he returned to South Africa to work in All Saints Hospital, Transkei. Six years later he moved to Durban. As he reached 50 he noticed the first signs of Parkinson's disease. He continued working over the next 10 years despite mounting disability. He leaves a wife, Gill, and three children. [HUGH SAXTON]

she took early retirement and moved to Abernethy in Perthshire. She leaves a husband, George; two children; and a grandson. [J M WATSON]

## Margaret Wylie Martin (née Thomas)



*Former child and maternity welfare services officer Glasgow (b 1903; q Glasgow 1927; MD), d 6 October 2002.*

She gained her MD in childbirth fever in 1931, at a time when 40% of those admitted to hospital with childbirth fever died from it. She worked at Belvidere and Mearnskirch hospitals in Glasgow. After marriage she was a great support to her husband—Russell Dickson Martin, a regional medical officer in Clydebank, Inverness, and Edinburgh—with her medical knowledge. She was a strong woman, known for her great hospitality and her love of her garden. Predeceased by her husband, she leaves three children and two grandchildren. [R MARTIN]

## Colin Francis Herridge



*Consultant psychiatrist Storthes Hall Hospital 1963-6, Springfield Hospital, Tooting, 1966-75, West Middlesex University Hospital 1975-86, St Andrew's at Harrow 1986-92, and Royal Masonic Hospital 1993-7 (b 1931; q Cambridge/St George's Hospital Medical School, London, 1955), died from meningitis on 28 February 2003.*

During Colin's time at the West Middlesex he set up a multidisciplinary psychiatric service for Hounslow, a forerunner of today's community mental health services. In addition to his NHS work and private practice, he attended Brixton prison hospital to examine those charged with murder. Colin enjoyed travel and had strong links with the Gambia. He leaves a wife, Midge; two children; and a grandson. [ANU SAYAL-BENNETT]

## Hilary Barbara Joy Cooke (née Rose)

*General practitioner, occupational health doctor, and clinical assistant in paediatrics (b 1920; q Birmingham 1944), d 6 March 2003.*

Barbara worked in general practice in Bradford, before she and her husband, Mac, practised in partnership in Smethwick. They each undertook occupational health work at local companies, and after Mac's decision to follow his interests of dermatology and occupational medicine full time, Barbara pursued hers in paediatrics. She was involved in one of the first units designed to use the observation of children at play as a means of assessing disability. She leaves Mac; four children; and 14 grandchildren. [ROGER COOKE, PAUL COOKE, MATTHEW COOKE]

## Ian Alexander McClure



*Former consultant ear, nose, and throat surgeon Ayrshire (b 1930; q Cambridge/Edinburgh 1955; FRCS Ed), died from complications of advanced peripheral vascular disease on 7 March 2003.*

After house posts and national service in the army, Ian continued his surgical training in Greenock. He was a senior registrar at Glasgow Royal Infirmary until 1967, when he was appointed a consultant at the Western Infirmary, Glasgow. In 1969 he moved to Ayrshire, where he practised for the next 28 years. Ian was an outstanding marksman, representing Scotland and Great Britain. He leaves a wife, Jennifer, and two children. [J DOUGLAS BROWN]

## Gerald Bernard Winter



*Former professor of paediatric dentistry London (b London 1928; q London Hospital 1958; DCH, FDSRCS, FRCPC), d 22 December 2002.*

Gerry Winter was the father of paediatric dentistry in Britain. From the time of his appointment as professor and honorary consultant in children's dentistry at the Institute of Dental Surgery at London University in 1966, he singlemindedly spearheaded a campaign to improve the dental health of children and the dental services available to them. He graduated in dentistry before completing his medical degree and held a lectureship in children's dentistry at the Royal Dental Hospital from 1959 to 1962, before being appointed to a consultant post at the Eastman Dental Hospital, London. His major clinical interest was in genetic disorders affecting the teeth. He leaves a wife, Eva, and two children. [J J MURRAY, JANE R GOODMAN]

## Elizabeth Stuart Gronbach (née Ross)

*Former general practitioner Dunblane and Lockerbie (b Inch, Aberdeenshire, 1936; q St Andrews 1960), died from respiratory complications associated with motor neurone disease on 24 November 2002.*

In 1961 Elizabeth became the first female general practitioner to be appointed in Dunblane. After her marriage in 1963, she moved to Lockerbie, where she again worked in general practice before transferring to community medicine. Elizabeth was heavily involved in the aftermath of the 1988 air disaster and living in Lockerbie was no longer the pleasure that it had been. In 1991

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